

# Instructions for School Officials, Special Milk Programs, Home Sponsors, Child Care and Head Start Centers

## **IMPORTANT NOTE**

The application for free and reduced meal and milk benefits has been modified to achieve uniformity between participating programs. We are encouraging parents to complete one application and provide copies of the same application to all Child Nutrition Programs in which their children participate.

APPLICANTS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR COMPLETING THEIR OWN APPLICATIONS. While schools, home sponsors and child care centers are expected to provide support and assistance, the applicants themselves should complete as much of the application as they are able.

Note that not all check boxes in Part 5 are applicable to all programs.

Child Nutrition Programs may share eligibility information among themselves. We encourage programs to develop cooperative relationships among other Child Nutrition Programs to maximize the number of eligible children receiving benefits.

## **YEARLONG ELIGIBILITY**

Households are NOT required to report changes in income, household size or eligibility for Food Assistance or FIP. Once properly approved for free or reduced price benefits, a household will remain eligible for the entire year. For home sponsors, child care and Head Start centers, the year ends on September 30. For schools, the year is the current school year plus the first 30 operating days of the following year. Households may apply at any time. Yearlong eligibility does not apply to households given temporary approval. See below regarding temporary approvals.

## **CHANGE IN ELIGIBILITY FOR CHILDREN ENROLLED IN HEAD START**

Children enrolled in Head Start programs are automatically eligible for free meals and remain eligible for the entire year. In the past, automatic eligibility was extended only to children who met Head Start income eligibility (so-called Federal slots). Eligibility for free meals is granted ONLY to children enrolled in Head Start; their siblings are NOT automatically granted free meal status and must qualify for benefits based on income, receipt of FIP or Food Assistance benefits, or migrant/homeless/runaway status. Head Start children are included as members of their households for income-based determinations. Documentation of Head Start enrollment must be provided by either the household or the Head Start agency, which may include an approved application, a letter of enrollment or a list of enrolled students.

The **Determining Official** will review Parts 1-4 of the application and then complete Part 5. Use these guidelines to make decisions for Part 5.

**Ethnic and Racial Information:** Child Nutrition Programs must collect and maintain data regarding the ethnic and racial characteristics of the children who are receiving benefits. Households may self-identify ethnic and racial information for children in Part 2. Child Nutrition Programs should make a visual determination of the ethnic and racial characteristics for any person who has not self identified.

**Income:** The Determining Official will fill in this portion of Part 5 when a household completes Part 3 – Total Household Gross Income. The Determining Official will record the total amount of income, income frequency and household size.

- If household income is reported with only one frequency (such as all weekly or all monthly), compare the sum of the incomes to the income eligibility chart for that frequency. Check the appropriate box and fill in the blank with the sum of the incomes.
- If a household reports income in more than one frequency (such as one income weekly and another monthly), convert all income to annual by using the conversion factors. **DO NOT ROUND THE CONVERSIONS.** Compare the sum of the annualized incomes to the income eligibility chart for annual income. Check the “annually” box and fill in the blank with the sum of the annualized incomes.
- Check the appropriate box under Application Approved (“income”) or Application Denied (“over income limits”). If the household qualifies, check the appropriate box under Eligibility Determination, sign and date the application.

**Tier 1 Income or Tier 1 Area:** NOTE: THIS APPLIES TO HOME SPONSORS ONLY. Documentation must be provided to demonstrate Tier 1 income eligibility.

**Tier 1 Eligible:** NOTE: THIS APPLIES TO PARENTS WHOSE CHILDREN RECEIVE CARE AT AN IN-HOME CARE SETTING. Eligibility is based on income, FIP or Food Assistance information on an Iowa Eligibility Application or a letter of direct certification.

**FIP or Food Assistance:** The Determining Official will mark the FIP/Food Assistance checkbox when a household completes Part 2 with a FIP or Food Assistance case number. **NOTE: THE NUMBER ON THE EBT/DEBIT CARD IS NOT THE CASE NUMBER.** The case number is on the Notice of Decision. Contact the local office of the Department of Human Services (DHS) for assistance. In many situations, the household can get the case number by calling the DHS office or

permitting the Determining Official to call. Households making application based on participation in FIP or Food Assistance programs but failing to provide a valid case number must be denied and the check box “incomplete” marked. When approved, the Determining Official will check the FIP/Food Assistance box, check the appropriate Eligibility Determination box, sign and date the application.

**Foster Child Household:** The adult completing the application will mark the checkbox for a foster child in Part 1. Each foster child is considered a household of one and should be on a separate application. Money available to foster children for their own use, including income earned by the child and funds specifically provided for the child’s personal use, must be reported as income. In very rare circumstances a foster child may have income too high to qualify. Stipends provided to foster families for the care of foster children are NOT income and are not reported on either the foster child’s application or the foster household’s application. Foster children may not be counted in the household of the foster family. When approved, the Determining Official will mark the “foster” checkbox when a child is in a foster placement and qualifies based on household income. The Determining Official will complete the Approval and Eligibility Determination, sign and date the application.

**Temporary Approval:** When a household reports zero income or a temporary reduction in income, eligibility must be determined based on the present rate of income rather than on regular annual income. The Determining Official will mark the Temporary Approval checkbox and record the date the temporary approval will expire. For schools, no more than 45 days for a temporary approval time limit is recommended. For CACFP, USDA sets a required maximum of 45 days for the temporary approval. At the end of each approval period, the school/center/home sponsor should contact the household to determine if the household’s circumstances have changed. A new application must be collected **ONLY IF THE HOUSEHOLD’S CIRCUMSTANCES HAVE CHANGED AND THEY NOW RECEIVE FIP OR FOOD ASSISTANCE OR HAVE AN INCOME.** If the household continues without income, the temporary approval period may be extended. See the Eligibility Guidance for School Meals Manual, Eligibility Guidance for Family Day Care Homes, or the CACFP *Steps to Success* manual for additional information. If the Temporary Approval expires without an extension or the completion of another application, the children must be changed to paid status.

**Homeless/Migrant/Runaway Child:** NOTE: THIS APPLIES TO SCHOOLS ONLY. Students determined to be homeless, migrant or runaway by the appropriate officials are not required to complete an application. Documentation of homeless, migrant or runaway status may be a letter or list of all students meeting criteria. If an application is completed, the Determining Official will mark the Homeless/Migrant checkbox. The Determining Official will complete the Approval and Eligibility Determination, sign and date the application. Retain information to document homeless/migrant/runaway status.

**Determining Official Signature Line:** The Determining Official makes the initial eligibility determination and will sign and date the application. The effective date is the date the Determining Official has made the eligibility determination.

**Confirming Official Signature Line:** NOTE: THIS APPLIES TO SCHOOLS ONLY. The Confirming Official reviews all applications selected for verification prior to conducting any other verification activity and checks the accuracy of the initial eligibility determination. The Determining Official and the Confirming Official cannot be the same person. Once the confirming reviews are completed, the Local Education Agency (LEA) will proceed with verification if the initial determination was correct. If the initial determination was incorrect, but the household is still eligible for benefits, the LEA must proceed with verification. If the initial determination was incorrect, and the household is no longer eligible or changed from free to reduced price, the LEA must correct the household’s status and notify the household of the change.

**Follow-up Official Signature Line:** NOTE: THIS APPLIES TO SCHOOLS ONLY. There is a formal follow-up requirement for households that fail to respond to the initial request for verification. The Follow-up Official may be the same person as the Determining Official or the Confirming Official. The Follow-up Official must make at least one attempt to obtain the necessary verification from the household. The attempt may be made through the mail, by telephone, by e-mail, or personal contact. The LEA must document any attempts and the results, if any. If the LEA is unable to verify the household’s eligibility status after the follow-up attempt(s), the household’s benefits must be terminated. The LEA may contract with a third party to assist with the required follow-up activity. Any third party is subject to the confidentiality requirements outlined in the current regulations. Refer to instructions for verification for more information.